Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Curlew Sandpiper, Lake Victoria Photo – Joy Weatherill

Losing touch with Nature

Geraldine Harris

Richard Louv, author of "Last Child in the Woods" and "The Nature Principle", has been in Melbourne (*as a guest of Australian Conversation Foundation in partnership with the Victorian Child and Nature Connection and the Sustainable Living Festival)* workshopping with health care personnel and talking to others about the elemental part of our selves that needs to be in touch with nature.

Many of us can recall childhoods spent with friends exploring our local environment with a sense of ownership and connection to the land and a feeling of trust (held also by our parents) that it cared and looked after us. For me there are memories of going on bird walks, gold panning along the creek, mushrooming and rabbiting over the hills and exploring the bush at Campbells Creek. Richard Louv wonders if our generation will be the last to have that feeling of ownership and connection to the land that "remains in his heart to this day".

Richard talked about how his parents introduced him to nature when he was young and how his father later developed a mental health and alcohol problem and withdrew from nature. After his father died he found a note which told how 'his garden was his Eden' and time spent there was 'the best time in his life'.

Since 2008 more people live in cities than in the country. We are moving into a world with a nature deficit. There has been a 50% decline in nature activities. In China only 5% of children explore nature and 1 in 10 children play outside once a week or less. 25% of Australian children are overweight or obese. Paediatric research shows that children on average are plugged in to electronic devices 7 1/2 hours per day. The number of children using mobile telephones has doubled in the last two years and there is an increased risk of developing myopia (near-sightedness) due to time spent looking at electronic screens.

Climate change, biodiversity and connecting children with nature are the three most important concerns today. There is a lack of images depicting a "wonderful future". At best we are aiming for "sustainability" but sustainability concerns only energy efficiency and won't inspire. We need to imagine a different future. We need

to build new kinds of cities that are nature rich and provide all children with opportunities for independent outside experiences so that they can develop through make believe and play - there needs to be space for boredom and daydreaming.

We need to rethink the way we live. "We cannot protect something we do not love, we cannot love what we do not know, and we cannot know what we do not see. And touch. And hear" - Richard Louv.

***Challenge to Field Naturalist members: Write a short article about a memorable nature experience(s) from your childhood or youth.*

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, Inc.
President's Report for 2013

Again we have enjoyed a varied program in our general meetings, subjects varying from bird studies in Fiji, to hunting for a Jaguar (and lots of spectacular birds!) in Brazil, moths of the Box Ironbark country, geology, palaeontology, a journey with Major Mitchell, and, of course, the immensely popular end of year "show and tell".

We would have loved to have gone to many of the places introduced by the speakers for our Field Trips, but, though Brazil was a bit ambitious, there were always places locally that were full of interest. Loddon Falls were visited after a talk on waterfalls of Victoria, we were escorted to Lushington bushland reserve after the talk on its Geology, and we joined members of the Barkers Creek Landcare network at Barkers Creek Reservoir (North Harcourt) for a picnic lunch followed by an afternoon of birding, and botanizing at the res. to help with their work there after a talk on birds.. We managed to visit one or two of the small reserves that Kit Morris has listed for surveying for viability, and visited our old favourite, Bells Swamp, which is drying out after some good years after flooding. We were amazed at the variety of plants we found on the day, though birds were fewer this time. A couple of times the Field Trip fell through due to the weather, and all too often only a very few attended, which I always feel disappointed about personally, as I can't help feeling that FIELD Naturalists means FIELD trips.

The Springtime Wednesday Wildflower Walks – now honestly called "Wanders" continued, and were quite popular again, though there's always fewer wanderers by the fifth week.

The Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater Surveys continue, but with reduced numbers taking part, but the Bird Count at the beginning of December saw four or five teams go out. These days are helpful for records for the threatened Species Network and Birds Australia, and a tiring but enjoyable day for the teams.

Roadside Clean-ups continue four times a year – more often if needed. A big Thank You to Geoff Harris for the use of his ute and for putting out the signs.

Planting a Box-Ironbark Forest display bed in the Gardens with Connecting Country was a satisfying morning with friendly cooperation between Connecting, Country, the Field Nats and the Mount Alexander Shire Council, with Gill Miller supervising and keeping the seedlings supplied by Frances Cincotta up to us. Between us we left very few for the Parks and Gardens staff to complete. Plants for the new bed are all species growing within the Mt Alexander Shire and will hopefully be labelled in the future.

Kit Morris represented the Club at the ANN planning meeting and Geraldine Harris was the CFNC official delegate at the ANN camp-out and meeting.

The Photopoint Project database, initiated many years ago by the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club with Parks Victoria, was made available for all club members and the local community. A copy of all of the photos was also lodged with the Castlemaine Historical Society. Ern and Lesley have played a huge role throughout this project. Recent financial and technical support was provided by Connecting Country.

The Computer upgrade was successful, making the showing of photos and Power-point presentations much easier, more reliable and quicker to set up.

The variety of information brochures produced by the club continued to sell, with many requests for more copies from the local information centre and others

Several members provided images for the Library's sunset event to welcome the start of Spring, which helped make a very successful evening.

The CFNC again donated a cheque for $100 for the Award for an Environmental Student who the staff considered had shown the keenest interest. For 2013 the recipient was Kalan Huntley.

The Castlemaine Naturalist, under Noel Young's editorship has kept up a high standard, with a number of regular contributors, and some wonderful photography, especially from Noel himself, and Joy Weatherill.

My grateful thanks go to the members of the Committee for their support during the year, especially to George Broadway who has not only done a sterling job as Secretary again, but has been a good guide when needed, and, along with Chris Timewell and Nigel Harland, helped me out by chairing most of the General meetings.

Nigel has not always been able to get to business meetings, but has made sure the Treasurer's report is there for us as long as it has been humanly possible.

As I mentioned Noel has been a reliable and very able Editor. All too often he has found himself having to not only edit, but write articles, too. His photos are a delight to look forward to each month.

Kit Morris has taken on the job of working out a good and usable survey sheet for the Small Reserves project, and has surveyed many of the reserves himself. He also took on the job of co-ordinating the teams for the Annual Bird Survey again.

Chris Timewell deserves some special thanks as he seems to have been in all places at all times – often opening up and setting up for the General Meeting, taking on setting up the new CFNC Website, co-ordinating between Connecting Country and Field Nats, and generally seeming to be in several places at once.

Richard Piesse still turns up at meetings when he can, and is happy to lead Field Trips to interesting places that he knows about. His suggestions about Field Trips are always valued.

Barbara Guerin has survived her first year on the committee and is another valuable member. She has added new viewpoints and ideas to think about.

To all the members of the Committee I say a very sincere "Thank you!" for your help, your keenness to serve on the committee to the best of your ability, and your support of me through a not very easy year. And thank you again, George and Phee, for allowing us to use of your home for the Business Meetings.

I hope that at least two or three members of the club will be willing to join the committee, which is a very good one, and a happy one, but we really do need some younger people to bring fresh ideas, and to learn the ropes – which really isn't very hard to do!

Rita Mills. President

Bird Count 1st December 2013

Barbara Guerin

I went on my first bird count last December and had a wonderful time. What a great way to spend a day – wandering through mature box woodlands, skirting dams to spy varied water birds and cruising country lanes for those species that prefer open spaces. Not as desperately competitive as a 'twitchathon', but still with a sense of purpose to get as many numbers and species as we could, the day produced a satisfying feeling of achievement and learning.

Our team, being Anne and Nigel Harland, Joy Weatherill and me, covered the Castlemaine north-west quadrant, staying north of the Maldon Road. We saw lots of Grey Teal and Wood ducks, some Pacific Black and one Hardhead duck, and Grebe on the Harris's dam, Sawmill Road. In the woodlands there, as well as the usual suspects, we identified two Brown Falcon by a combination of Nigel's familiarity with their characteristics and Joy's quick-off-the-mark photo. Out into more open farm country we saw five Rufous Songlarks in the hedgerows. I wasn't familiar with them as they don't inhabit Castlemaine's bush. We got a good listen to their song in flight which I hope I'll remember for next time.

Muckleford Station was great fun with Striated Pardalotes zipping in to feed their young in their burrows in the retaining walls under the platform. The adult pardalotes seemed to all arrive at once. Is this a survival mechanism – lower the odds of being the one who is snatched by a predator?

We used binoculars to spot Pelicans, Black Swans, a Little Eagle and more grebes and ducks on a large dam in the Walmer area. We stopped the car every time we saw birds in the roadside trees and added to our species and numbers as we completed our loop back to Castlemaine. We saw four Little Corella, a species that wasn't on our checklist – as well, of course, as 75 (give or take a few) Long-billed Corella.

Anne and Nigel had to leave at lunchtime so Joy and I went out to Expedition Pass reservoir as somewhere not too far away where we might see a good range of birds. Kit's team had already been there so in the final results for our team we didn't double-count any species that they had already seen in the morning. We did however see a yellow robin, a scrubwren and some thornbills in the bush down the far end that they hadn't seen. Anne and Nigel went out on the Sunday morning and added another seven to our list - making a total of 68 species and 652 birds.

Birds on Lake Victoria (Bellarine Peninsula)

This summer (November - January)

Joy Weatherill

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper [photo 2]
Curlew Sandpiper [cover photo]
Whiskered Tern [ph 5]
Caspian Tern
Red-kneed Dotterel [ph 4]
Red-capped Plover
Masked Lapwing
Black-winged Stilt [ph 3]
Silver Gull
Red-necked Stint [ph 1]
Common Greenshank
Eurasian Coot
Chestnut Teal
Grey Teal
Great Cormorant
White-faced Heron
Royal Spoonbill
Black Swan
Superb Fairy-wren

1

2

3

4

5

Joyces Creek excursion 15/2/14

Rita Mills

After the heatwave of the week before, it was very pleasant to drive out to Cairn Curran via Newstead under an overcast sky, even passing through a shower of rain near the Castlemaine Golf Club. We had decided that we wouldn't be able to get to the Loddon Delta, one of Geoff Park's special wader spots at this time of year, but we settled on Joyces Creek, parking under the trees on the east side of the arm of the lake, and wandering south along it. Though a couple of families arrived with fishing tackle, we still had a good afternoon's birding.

Among the special sightings were a couple of Black-winged Stilts, Black-fronted Dotterels and a Caspian Tern. There were numerous birds in the Red Gums behind us, but they were very hard to spot, though we confirmed White Plumed, which are almost always found among the Red Gums, Fuscous and New Holland Honeyeaters.

A raptor perched in a dead tree on the other side of the arm had us guessing for quite some time, but later two or three were seen gliding over the lake and paddocks later in the afternoon, and were eventually identified as Whistling Kites.

The list for the afternoon was: Pelican, White Ibis, White-faced Heron, Great Egret, Magpie, Black-winged Stilt, Wood Ducks, Grey Teal, Magpie-lark, Masked Lapwing, Coot, which were feeding on the bank until we got too close for their liking, Great Black and Little Black Cormorants, a female Darter, Black-fronted Dotterel, Caspian Tern, Welcome Swallow, Long-billed Corella, Grey Shrike-thrush, White-plumed, Fuscous and New-Holland Honeyeaters, Crested Pigeon, Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, Little Raven, Whistling Kite, and for the ones who ventured a little further, White-fronted Chats - 29 species between five of us.

Further notes on the Australian Koel in Victoria and Castlemaine.

By Chris Timewell

Noel Young's great article in the February newsletter about the Australian Koel prompted me to investigate a bit further as well. I'm yet to see or hear a Koel locally (or anywhere in Victoria), but am interested to follow the reports about where they've been turning up across the state. It'd be fantastic to add one to my local list of birds seen, but I'm not keen for one as a regular backyard resident. They have been described to me as the 'brain torture' bird, due to their penetrating single note whistling call – which they like to repeat continuously through the night and day for weeks on end.

John van Tiggelen is editor of The Monthly magazine, and often writes articles as well. On the 21 December 2013, John had an article of his published in the Saturday Age's Good Weekend magazine, whereby he expressed his surprise to hear a Koel calling outside his house in Castlemaine during the previous month. He is familiar with the species from his time living in north Queensland. Like Noel, he also speculated that climate change could be a factor in its range expansion, but he also suggested that they may be adapting to human habitats. This latter suggestion has some merit, as most of the new records from Victoria have been

recorded in urban parks and gardens (although, admittedly, this is also where most bird watchers are active).

A couple of weeks later, the Good Weekend magazine published a short letter from another local resident who said that she'd been hearing and seeing Koels in Castlemaine ever since she moved here in the late 1990s. My first reaction upon reading this response was skepticism, as I find it difficult to believe that almost no other local field naturalist has reported them during the intervening years prior to the present summer (other than the single observations noted by Noel for Maldon in 2009 and at Castlemaine train station in 2012). However, it is possible that this person lives in a more secluded part of Castlemaine or surrounds where an annual visitation by the Koel has been missed by other keen bird observers.

I have a copy of a book published in 1987 that is now quite difficult to obtain – the 'Atlas of Victorian Birds'. It was jointly published by the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union (a precursor of Birdlife Australia) and the Victorian Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands. This book contains maps and information about the distribution of all Victorian bird species, and is based on records from two sources: (a) 615,000 field records from the first RAOU bird atlas conducted from 1977 to 1981, and (b) 65,000 field records collected between 1973 and 1986 by officers of the National Parks and Wildlife Division of Victoria. From all of these thousands of records, there were only two documented observations of the Australian Koel from the whole of Victoria. One was in Blackburn in late 1975, and the other was from Wingan Inlet in East Gippsland in early 1981.

I suspect we'll learn more about the Koel's intentions in central Victoria over the next few summers.

Observations

February meeting -

- Denis Hurley reported Blue banded Bees at potted Basil flowers, and a hyper-active pair of Grey Fantails chasing off Wattlebirds, Currawongs and other species from the bird bath
- 20 or more Red-browed Finches around the property - Geraldine H
- Penny Garnet passed on a report of a Collared Sparrowhawk
- Eastern Rosellas moved in to a tree hollow after it was vacated by nesting Crimson Rosellas - Natalie de Maccus
- Several recent reports of Rainbow Lorikeets were discussed, including its return to Kaweka in January for the second year
- Following on Nigel's report in the CN, the topic of birds flying into windows was further discussed

Late February -

- Tawny Frogmouth seen recently at Kaweka - Kit Morris
- New Holland Honeyeaters in the garden - George Broadway
- Spinebill outside the window on apple berry - Geraldine Harris
- Feb 23 - Chris Timewell saw two to three thousand Pink-eared Duck on Lake Learmonth near Ballarat

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri March 14 meeting: speaker to be confirmed

Sat March 15 field trip: cancelled in lieu roadside cleanup

Sat March 22: Roadside cleanup meet 9.00 am at the iron works, just past the Maldon Rd junction on the Newstead Road

Fri April 11 meeting: speaker Carol Hall - Iceland

Fri May 9 meeting: speaker Les Hanrahan - fungi

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2014
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2014 Committee

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